

bill together. I thank them for their dedication in advancing the simple idea that all Americans, no matter what ZIP Code they live in, should have the freedom to vote safely and securely. I want to particularly thank Senator MANCHIN, who has led the way in finding common ground with our Republican colleagues on this proposal.

It is now time for us to move forward on this legislation as promised.

Now, just so we are all clear, the vote that will happen on Wednesday is a procedural vote to begin debate on the bill. Voting yes does not mean signing on any policy or bill text; it is, rather, an invitation for Senators to come to the table to debate, to deliberate, and to compromise, just as the Senate was meant to do.

If there is anything worthy of debate in this Chamber, it should be protecting and strengthening our democracy. With everything we are seeing at the State level, the Senate must take action, and we must take action now. The right to vote is the beating heart of any democracy.

I know we can vote to protect our elections and empower all Americans to have their voices heard. I hope we can do so together across the aisle. I implore my Republican colleagues to come to the table and work with us on this issue. I implore them to turn away from spurious claims of the Big Lie that are degrading faith in our democracy.

I know many of my colleagues agree in their heart of hearts that we cannot allow our democracy to fall victim to conspiracy theories, subversion, and disinformation, but they must join us in working towards solutions. To be sure, Senate Democrats don't expect that our Republican colleagues will agree with every idea we have on voting rights. We know the disagreements run deep. But in this Chamber, Senators should not run away from debating the things we disagree about. If our Republican colleagues have good ideas, we are ready to work in good faith to listen to them, to consider them, and if they are aligned with the goals of this bill, to include them in the final text. But for any of that to happen, our Republican colleagues must agree to come to the table first. They should agree to let the Senate begin debate. That is all this first vote is. It says: Are we willing to debate voting rights, sacred and important in our democracy?

It is not acceptable to simply turn away from debating voting rights, to act as if the Congress has no role to play in the defense of free and fair elections and simply pretend like there is nothing malicious afoot at the State level. No, inaction is not an option. The clock is ticking—the clock is ticking—for this Chamber to do something to protect our democracy before these dangerous laws take root for the next election. The Senate can rise to the task if given the chance, but it must be allowed to begin its work first.

Republicans, later this week, will have a chance to go on record and show if they believe that protecting our democracy is worthy of this Chamber's attention.

BUILD BACK BETTER AGENDA

Madam President, finally, a quick BBB update. This week, Senate Democrats continue our work on finalizing our Build Back Better agenda. Congress, right now, has the best chance in years to make meaningful investments to help American families climb up to the middle class and stay in the middle class.

By passing both the Build Back Better Act and the infrastructure bill, we can improve our Nation's crumbling infrastructure, create good-paying jobs for this century, and lower costs and cut taxes for American families, while taking overdue steps to meaningfully address the climate crisis. It is a difficult task, but we are committed to getting it done.

Over the last week and weekend, I held many productive conversations with my colleagues here in the Senate, with Speaker PELOSI, and with the White House. We still have work to do. We all know that in order to pass meaningful legislation, we must put aside our differences and find common ground within our party. As with any bill of such historic proportions, not every Member will get everything he or she wants, but at the end of the day, we will pass legislation that dramatically improves the lives of the American people. We will continue to make progress and keep working until the job is done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, less than a month ago, President Biden made a surprising statement—or maybe I should say, another surprising statement. He said: My Build Back Better agenda costs zero dollars—zero dollars. That is a big, you might even say unbelievable claim.

For starters, half of his agenda is a trillion-dollar infrastructure bill that will increase the deficit by more than \$250 billion over 10 years. The other part is a multitrillion-dollar tax-and-spending spree, which leans on damaging tax hikes to cover a long list of social welfare programs to make the United States of America look more like, say, a European social welfare state. Now, how could that possibly cost zero dollars? Well, the answer is pretty simple: It can't. Even the Washington Post fact checkers gave this claim two Pinocchios.

This strategy of misleading, misstating, and—I hate to say it, but there is no other word for it—downright lying to the American people is a tried-and-true strategy of the Biden administration. Whether it is advancing legislation or dodging a crisis, there is no promise that is too big to make, even if it is patently false.

Another example. Dating back to the campaign trail, President Biden has re-

peatedly promised the American people: If you make over \$400,000 a year—excuse me—if you make under \$400,000 a year, you will not pay more income tax. Well, we have heard the same talking points from the Treasury Secretary, Secretary Yellen, and the White House Press Secretary dutifully comes out and parrots the same position again and again and again. It is almost as if, if you say something often enough, people will begin to believe it even if it is not true.

Considering the enormous amounts of spending that the Biden administration has promised, I understand why they are a little worried about the truth. All of us like free stuff, whether it is a free T-shirt at a football game or free samples at a grocery store. What folks don't like, though, is learning that they are being played and that they are still paying but maybe by different means. So when it comes to free college, free childcare, and other free programs under President Biden's agenda, most people realize there is no such thing as a free lunch. Somebody somewhere is going to have to pay for it, even if it is borrowed money. The next generation, like our pages here, when they enter the workforce, they are going to be the ones who have to pay that money back. Somebody is going to have to pay it back. There is no such thing as free.

Contrary to the promises made by President Biden and his administration, the middle class will help to foot the bill for this spending bonanza. An analysis by the nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation found that many families will see their taxes increase under President Biden's Build Back Better agenda.

In 2023, 2 years from now, 18 percent of those earning between \$75,000 and \$100,000 will pay more in taxes, not \$400,000 or more. More than a third of the folks earning between \$100,000 and \$200,000 a year will see a tax increase, not people making \$400,000 or more. If this trend continues into 2027, well over half of taxpayers earning between \$75,000 and \$100,000 will pay more in taxes. And a whopping 86 percent of folks earning between \$100,000 and \$200,000 will see a tax increase.

Now, you might wonder, how can the President have it so wrong? This is not news to President Biden. He knows better. He is surrounded by world-class economic advisers, analysts, and tax experts who scrutinize and scrub every single policy before it comes to see the light of day. Yet, you might wonder, why does the President persist in claiming that his tax hikes won't impact the middle class even as he is trying to slip them a massive tax bill? I hate to state the obvious, but it is just dishonest.

Of course, all of this comes at a time when many family budgets are already underwater, struggling to recover from the fiscal impact of COVID-19. Now, from gas stations, to grocery stores, to electricity bills and restaurant checks,

the American people are being pummeled by inflation, paying more for the things they used to pay less for.

What is the Biden administration's response? Well, the President's Chief of Staff, Ron Klain, dismissed inflation as something he called a high-class problem, which I guess means that only rich people are suffering or experience that inflation. Again, this is clearly not true. My constituents in Texas don't see it that way. They see inflation outpacing their wage increases and essentially giving them a pay cut. They are paying 10 percent more at the butcher counter than they were a year ago and 42 percent more on gasoline. If you are a senior operating on a fixed income, you have to spend more of that fixed income to end up with less.

So, no, this isn't just a problem for the high class. Unfortunately, it is not going away soon either. You remember when concerns were raised with the Federal Reserve Chairman, Jay Powell, about inflation, and he said: Well, it is probably only transitory—meaning it is a passing moment. Well, now we see that economists expect inflation rates to remain steady through the end of next year, which would mark the longest period of inflation above 5 percent in three decades. So if inflation is at 5 percent, that means you are having to pay \$1.05 to get what you used to pay \$1 for, and it is compounded each year.

While inflation is expected to ease some—or at least we are hoping and praying that is the effect—by the middle of next year, rates are still likely to be higher than they were before the pandemic.

Folks who can't afford to fill up their gas tanks to get back and forth to work or buy what they need at the grocery store don't need to be told that things are just fine when they know they are not. The American people need to see real leadership here that addresses the root causes of inflation, not pouring gas on that inflation as the \$3½ trillion reckless tax-and-spending spree would do. It would just create more money chasing the same goods and services, driving prices up. And the American people certainly deserve better than false statements that ignore the magnitude of their pain.

AFGHANISTAN

Madam President, as I have said before, we have seen this playbook again and again. Following an objectively chaotic exit from Afghanistan because of the President's arbitrary decision date, President Biden called the mission an extraordinary success. Well, we know that is not true. We can see that with our own eyes. We know that 13 brave servicemembers lost their lives in a terrorist attack, including a young marine named David Espinoza, whose funeral my wife and I attended in Laredo, TX.

Countless Americans and Afghan allies were left behind. We heard from the State Department today that they can't even tell us how many Afghans, who qualify for the special immigrant

visa, remain in Afghanistan, and we know now, with the Taliban in control, that they are hunting down people who worked with the United States during the last 20 years in order to prevent another terrorist attack like we experienced on 9/11/2001. And, no, the new Taliban is not better or a kinder, gentler version of the old Taliban.

So in no way could this be considered a success, let alone an extraordinary one.

And then there is the border. Ever since President Biden became President, his administration has either ignored, downplayed, or denied the humanitarian crisis at our border. For months, the administration wouldn't even talk about it; and when it did, there were very peculiar rules that applied, apparently, to how it should be discussed.

The administration refused to use the term "crisis" and came up with a range of euphemisms to downplay what was actually happening. They called it a challenge, a situation, a mess—all to, apparently, deceive the American people into thinking that what you are seeing with your own eyes is not really a problem.

The Secretary of Homeland Security took this deception to a whole new level recently. When testifying before a House committee last week, Secretary Mayorkas said the border is "no less secure than it was previously."

That is demonstrably false. The data tells a very clearly different story.

In the first 7 months of the Biden administration, more than 1.2 million migrants have crossed our southern border. That is an astronomical number, 1.2 million. To provide some context, in 7 months, Customs and Border Protection encountered 2½ times as many people as they did in all of fiscal year 2020.

So it is not getting any better if the Secretary of Homeland Security, whose responsibility it is to secure the border, says things are no worse off than they used to be. At the same time, he tells us that the numbers are unrivaled in the last 20 years. Both can't be true.

So whatever you want to call this—lying, misleading, or gaslighting—we have all had to learn a little bit of a new vocabulary. "Gaslighting" basically means creating your own alternative reality and trying to sell that as true.

None of this changes the fact that the Biden administration has consistently tried to deceive the American people about each of these matters. And the list actually goes on and on. The President and his administration won't even admit there is a humanitarian crisis along our southern border, let alone take the pretty obvious and necessary steps to address it.

Senator SINEMA from Arizona, a Democrat, and I, a Republican from Texas, working with HENRY CUELLAR, a Democrat from Laredo, and TONY GONZALES, a Republican who represents

the largest border district in the country, we presented the bipartisan border security plan, but the administration just looks the other way.

They won't acknowledge their massive failures in Afghanistan either, which resulted in the death of 13 servicemembers and left our allies, our friends, and their families in a lurch.

And they refuse to admit that their reckless tax-and-spending-spree bill is designed to fundamentally transform America and will drive up taxes not just for the wealthy, but for the middle class, and hurt our already wobbly postpandemic economy.

This is not what leadership should look like. The American people deserve better than getting scammed by their own President, no less.

If the administration put half as much energy in trying to solve problems as it does in trying to disassemble them or to cover them up, our Nation would be far better off.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

BORDER SECURITY

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, for the past several months, the Biden administration and their officials have devoted their time to one of two things: They have blamed Republicans for problems that they, the Democrats, created, or denying those problems exist at all.

As my colleague from Texas said: Don't believe what you are seeing.

That seems to be a common refrain.

Just last week, White House Chief of Staff Ron Klain retweeted the former Chairman of President Obama's Council of Economic Advisers when he dismissed rising inflation and collapsing supply chains as "high class problems."

Apparently, he thinks those sky-high prices at the grocery store only affect the rich. How wrong they are.

On this same day Ron was scrolling through Twitter, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki insisted that the American people just started paying attention to their finances this year. Never before this year have they looked at their finances. She stood in front of the entire press pool, dismissed serious economic pain as a passing concern, and tried to spin the memory of the prepandemic, pre-Biden economy out of everyone's memory.

Last week, I saw firsthand the consequences of this policy of deflection. Let me tell you, if you want to see what it looks like when our government undermines and abandons entire communities, you need look no further than our Nation's southern border.

What I saw during my recent trip to south Texas was a humanitarian crisis, a healthcare crisis, and a national security crisis. And make no mistake, nothing that is happening down there is the result of some unfortunate accident.

This is no everyday failure of leadership. If our so-called border czar cared